Proposal to offer a First-Year Seminar

This form should be completed for all new and returning first-year seminar courses. First-year seminar proposals will be reviewed and approved by the Writing Program Committee. We understand that your proposal may be in the preliminary stages of development, but this information helps us provide you with feedback and approval. Please submit this completed form to WPC@muhlenberg.edu, by Friday, January 24, 2014.

If you have offered this first-year seminar at the college in previous years, please provide:

☐ The title
☐ The most recent semester the seminar was offered
☐ The most recent syllabus. The syllabus may be attached in lieu of the information requested below, or you may provide the information and receive feedback from the Writing Program Committee.

If you are seeking approval for a new first-year seminar, please provide:

☐ A Working Title of Seminar
  ▪ Compose a working title that you think will be appealing to incoming students while also emphasizing the academic focus of the course.
  ▪ Please Note: Titles longer than 24 characters will be abbreviated on course schedules and student transcripts.

☐ Catalog Description of Seminar
  ▪ In 200 words or less, please explain the seminar’s focus, including the major questions that you will address and a few of the texts that you plan to read.
  ▪ A sentence that describes the kind of writing you plan to do in the course would be helpful.

☐ Proposed Reading List
  ▪ First-year seminars must include rigorous, college-level reading. Students need to learn how to negotiate academic texts.
  ▪ Please note that films cannot substitute for readings.

☐ A brief discussion of how writing will shape the pedagogy of your course
  ▪ What kinds of writing assignments do you envision and how many?
  ▪ Please see the attached Guidelines & Best Practices for Teaching First-Year Seminars for more information.
Working Title
Sitting Down to Write: Investigating Contemplation and Writing

Catalog Description of Seminar

“Reduce Stress!” “Discover Inner Peace!” From Tazo’s Zen Tea to Google’s “Search Inside Yourself” seminars, modern Western references to traditional meditative techniques are everywhere. What are the traditional, often religious, referents of these modern expressions, and what elements of those practices are common across traditions and historical periods? What role do these practices and references to them play in today’s American culture? This seminar explores the wide variety of traditional and modern contemplative techniques, as well as their contemporary implementations in the diverse spheres of the visual and performing arts, education, business, exercise, psychology, environmental ethics, medical science, and activist practices. How is meditation understood as process? As performance? As expression? In reading authors who have written about meditation, or have used it in their own writing, we will also experiment with various contemplative writing exercises to explore their possible contributions to our own writing process.

Proposed Reading List
The following is a list of readings I am considering.

Traditions of Contemplation: Observational and Generative

Meditation and Art

The Science of Mindfulness

Secular Applications
A brief discussion of how writing will shape the pedagogy of your course

One of the keys to good writing is patient and careful observation, a holding-off from judgment while we notice patterns, tendencies, irregularities and synchronicities. It is a process that resembles the contemplative techniques of a variety of philosophical and religious traditions. Students will be asked to engage with these techniques as objects of their own critical analysis, but also to explore the practices of introspection and observation as potential resources for their own writing-as-thinking process. Thus, journaling, free-writing, passage pointing, and descriptive writing will be frequently assigned, and their utility in the writing process examined by students based on their own experience.

Not all meditation involves merely observing, however, and the course will also take up more analytic, embodied, and creative forms, again as objects of study and as models for the reading and writing.

I would like to assign aspects of the final paper on a particular form of meditation in stages and versions, allowing students to take their time with discrete types of thinking and writing about one particular topic. I envision these stages to look something like this:
Stage 1: Central Questions (free writing in response to initial readings)
Stage 2: Descriptive Essay (describing interesting or surprising elements in the material)
Stage 3: Questioning Assumptions (reading one another’s writing and trying to locate assumptions within it)
Stage 4: Investigating Possible Criticisms (writing from a “Devil’s Advocate” position, making an argument)
Stage 5: First Full Draft (rewriting a single section multiple ways to explore the power of language)
Stage 6: Final Version (a 7-10 page analytical paper)